



Feature Article

Beating Telework Challenges Pays Off Big in Energy Savings

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It sounds so simple. More people telework full or part-time instead of commuting, saving millions of tonnes in carbon emissions. In turn, fewer workers in the office help meet corporate 'Green Business' objectives through reduced size of facilities, saving even more energy.

Add to that, higher employee satisfaction from not fighting traffic each day, often transforming road time into home office productivity, and you might expect that expanding telework programs are near the top of today's corporate agendas.

Not necessarily.

[CIO Insight Research's Mobility Survey*](#) recently found that 51 percent of CIOs and senior IT leaders surveyed indicate their companies discourage full-time telecommuting. The survey found [businesses appeared more willing*](#) to provide remote access for business travel or off-work hours over full or part-time telecommuting. On the more positive side, half of those surveyed indicated rising transportation costs will increase the number of days employees work from home.

Another [recent survey*](#) by a government IT vendor, CDW-G estimated that only 17 percent of U.S. federal employees telework, eight years after Congress passed a law requiring government agencies to allow telework. That level of teleworking in government was ahead of the private sector's 14 percent, according to the survey.

In spite of technologies that make it easy and affordable for employees to have the same communications capabilities at home that they'd have in the office, broad implementation of teleworking continues to be plagued by misconceptions and issues of trust. When employees are at home, out of a manager's view, are they really working or slacking off? Is confidentiality of corporate information being adequately protected? Is network access as secure at home as in the office?

It's not surprising that resistance to telework persists even in this new era of [Hyperconnectivity](#) where we are increasingly connected all the time, across varying devices. Most companies already support remote connectivity and mobile communications to help employees improve customer responsiveness and quick resolution of problems when out of the office, as the CIO Insights study suggests. But the challenges of extending occasional remote access to full or part-time telework can be much more complex than providing secure home access and online collaborative tools like [unified communications](#). It also requires major management shifts in human resource practices and how teams work together virtually.

Because not all jobs will be suitable for telework, company-wide implementation can cause resentment for those left in the office, stuck with the daily commute. Even when a job is eligible, some employees may find they miss the supportive camaraderie of the office, feel they're too isolated at home, unable to stay motivated, or fear they'll be passed

by for promotions if not physically visible to company leaders. And some managers find it difficult to adapt to virtual teams, unable to trust home workers are being productive, creating highly stressed relationships.

At Nortel, when we help customers understand that the challenges of telework go well beyond simply providing remote technologies, we're drawing on 15 years experience in actively encouraging telework as a way for employees to balance their work and personal lives. Through our own [Integrated Work Environment program](#), about 80 percent of Nortel employees are equipped to telework, while 10 percent work out of a home office on a full-time basis. Here are the benefits we've experienced:

- An estimated \$500 a year is saved on fuel costs by employees who work from home one day a week
- An estimated 15 percent increase in productivity among teleworkers, with 94 percent reporting 15 to 20 percent greater productivity
- An 11 percent increase in satisfaction among teleworkers compared to the overall employee population
- Annual real estate savings of about US\$9,000 per full-time teleworker
- Savings of approximately US \$22 million per year in real estate costs and associated energy usage
- 18 percent of employees chose "Flexibility" as the #1 reason they like Nortel
- Based on reduced electricity consumption, Nortel's 2,500 registered teleworkers decrease the company's

carbon emissions, by 18,070 metric tonnes per year

Nortel's results are consistent with results from other recent telework studies. One study by [Telework Exchange*](#) estimated that if everyone in the U.S. who could work from home, teleworked just two days a week, the country would save 9.7 billion gallons of gas and \$38.2 billion a year.

As for time lost to commuting, [recent figures from Work Wise UK*](#), in conjunction with the Automobile Association, indicates the average UK commuter spends almost 29 working days each year traveling to work, amounting to more than five years over a working life. The estimates for commuters into traffic-packed London

were even higher, totaling 96 working days each year or 18 years during a career.

A similar 2008 study by Telework Exchange and the [U.S. National Science Foundation*](#) (NSF) estimated the agency saves more than one million pounds of carbon emissions annually and \$700,000 in commuting costs by having 52 percent of its 1,200 employees telework - 32 percent doing so on a regular basis. And, NSF managers reported that productivity of teleworkers increased, or remained the same as when they had been in an office.

Last year in Japan, the government launched a [national telework initiative*](#) with the objective of doubling the number of telecommuters by 2010 from 6.74 million in 2005 to an estimated 20 percent of the workforce. In the U.K., the non-profit agency [Work Wise UK*](#) is

targeting an increase of telework in that country from 3.1 million to 14 million by 2011 which is about half of the current workforce.

With these types of initiatives now gaining traction because of rising energy costs, telework may well be on the verge of reaching its full potential as a valuable productivity and energy saving benefit. We all have a social responsibility to reduce how much energy we consume and if employers are open to re-evaluating the traditional way work is done, telework can make significant contributions to every company's 'green business' objectives.

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